

5 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO FACILITATE **A 1BANGSA OF MALAYSIANS**

THE PROBLEM

The current “Allah” debate in Malaysia provides a context to discuss the question of 1Bangsa Malaysia and to ask: ***Why isn’t there a common national identity that all citizens can subscribe to which supersedes other loyalties and identities?***

SYMPTOMS

At a Muslim-Christian dialogue hosted by OHMSI recently, the absence of a 1Bangsa Malaysia identity was identified to result from the following 12 obstacles to social cohesion. They can also be seen as symptoms contributing to the problem and helps explain why forging a shared towards a ‘1National Identity’ is difficult.

1. Race and religion are the basis of differentiated citizenship.
2. Lack of credible leadership development.
3. Weakened institutions of authority.
4. Lack of basic citizenship education.
5. Lack of trust between communities; even after 50 years
6. Lack of political leadership with constitutional integrity.
7. Lack of clear political will and direction for nation-state.
8. Lack of credible statesmanlike leaders.
9. Obsession with race issues; especially Article 153.
10. Disagreement over the secular nature of the Federal Constitution.
11. Double standards in political governance.
12. Aggressive political Islamisation.

CAUSAL ANALYSES

The above symptoms were summarized as the results of the following five core causes:

i) Divisive race/religion rhetoric

Racial and religious rhetoric have become so divisive that it is impossible to have reciprocal dialogue with groups like PERKASA, ISMA and some federal and state religious authorities. The persistence of a racial/religious framework at work in almost all dimensions of society can be traced to the failure to accept the historical realities of each community since pre-Merdeka and a lack of citizenship education that emphasises common rights. Differing worldviews as a result of economic, education, language and geographical disparities has resulted in entrenched mindsets and prevents consensus on what a common Malaysian identity means. If national leaders are to be moved to action, issues ought to be re-framed in terms of costs and benefits to the country’s economic and international standing.

ii) Lack of credible leadership with demonstrated integrity

There is a disconnect between the words and deeds of national leaders

and agencies when it comes to racial and religious issues, as seen in selective or double standards applied against incendiary remarks or actions. When leaders talk about national harmony on the one hand, yet remain silent, or worse, condone extreme views or actions on the other, public perception and confidence is further eroded.

iii) *Absence of framework of trust*

Historical 'truths' are subjective and relative to each group and as such, become a source of distrust between groups, be it about sharing the economic pie or the issue of conversions between Islam and other religions. This distrust has its roots in history and again highlights the failure to accept the past realities of each community. These include the compromises and sacrifices made by all ethnic groups in the formation of Malaysia. In the "Allah" debate, failure to accept the historical reality that Bumiputra Christians have long since used the word is a pertinent example. An acceptance of all histories and a common narrative are prerequisites for framework of mutual trust, without which a common identity cannot be forged.

iv) *Need for citizenship education*

National education has failed to produce critical thinkers, skilled and competitive workers, and citizens with integrity and good work ethics. Constitutionalism and citizenship rights are negligible in public education. School children begin their formative years in segregation; divided into different classes for religious or moral teaching. Ethnic polarisation is further entrenched in the continuing education of civil servants through the Biro Tata Negara, the effects of which spill over to citizens through the public delivery system. The result is Malaysians' inability to see themselves as 'one'.

v) *No political will*

We appear to lack any political will to move the country beyond racial and religious rhetoric because doing so for politicians serves no immediate benefit. The prevailing political culture is also one whereby public interest comes second to personal enrichment. It appears political will can only be restored at a foundational and formative level – starting with the young in schools by teaching that politics is for the common good and is a national service.

FIVE POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

Differences will exist, regardless, and the real question is whether people and leaders are willing to work together on a shared identity in spite of their differences. The framework could then be shifted from defining a common identity in terms of race or cultural traits, to what is the common good for society.

Preconditions that must exist before honest and meaningful integration is possible are: *Firstly*, when people can separate needs from wants, with assistance given only to those whose needs qualify, and *secondly*, those whose basic needs are met must agree to compete on merit for other benefits and privileges that are public goods and services.

The path forward seems formidable, but change is imperative; the mindset shift has already happened in a significant number of Malaysians, as seen through the last two general election results. The time is ripe for more moderate, urban, and middle-class Malaysians to speak up and be involved in the change agenda.

- I. ***An anti-bigotry legislation*** – as a first step towards building a framework of trust for honest dialogue. Thereafter trust must be developed and learned; programmes like National Service for youths are good platforms, but these must be freed from political interference.
- II. ***Credible leadership with integrity*** – by starting a national platform for repentance/confession of wrongs that have caused national disunity. A repentance and reconciliation exercise can be part of a larger mechanism to restore credibility to the national leadership.
- III. ***Reinstate the preamble of the Rukun Negara*** as the new preamble to the Federal Constitution originally agreed to after the first NOCC meeting following the 13 May 1969 riots.
- IV. ***Nationwide citizenship education courses*** from Year 6 and upwards, including issues on “Allah” and hudud.
- V. ***Adopt a new policy of evolving a1Bangsa of Malaysians*** for national integration with constitutional integrity, incorporating existing national unity agendas with further thrusts on common and equal rights of all communities.

Tabled and approved by OHMSI Sdn Bhd
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